NEW
# NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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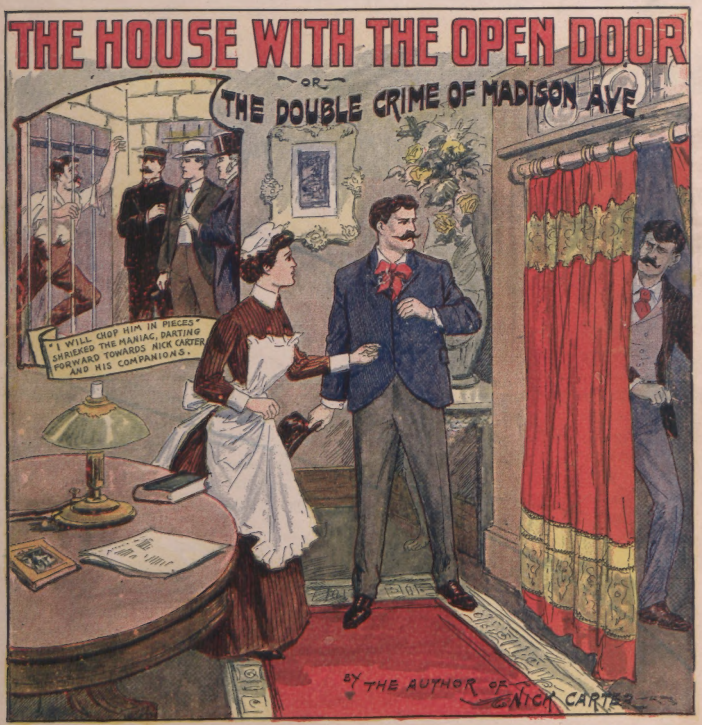
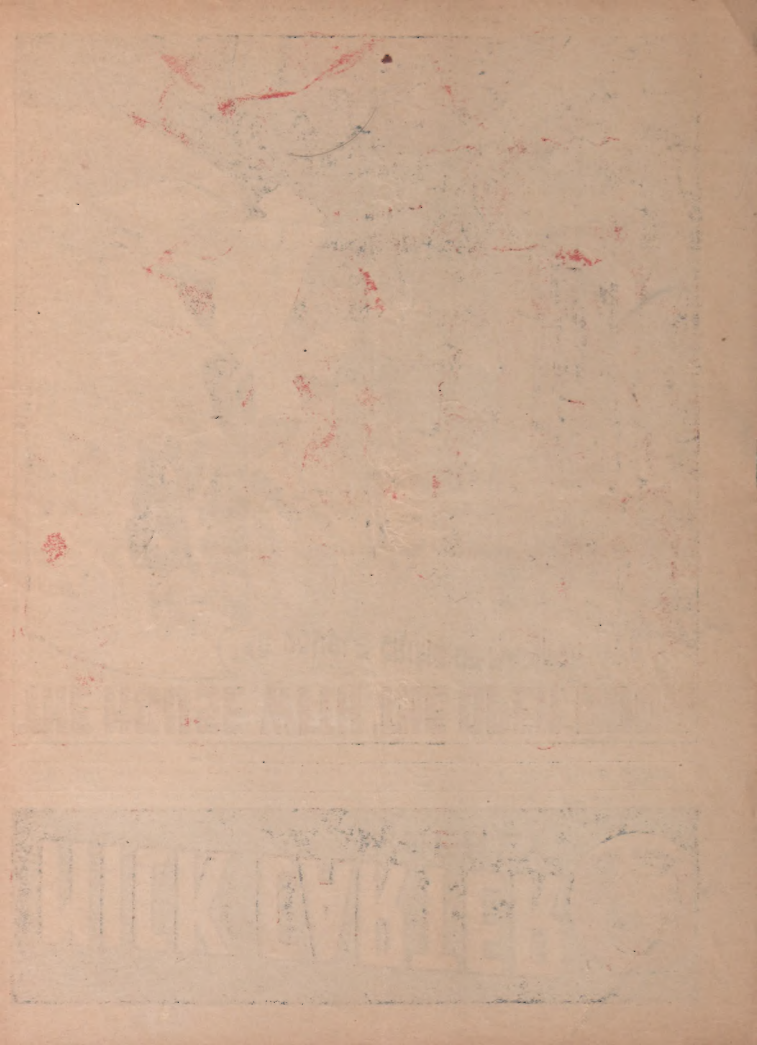
# THE HOUSE WITH THE OPEN DOOR

## OR THE DOUBLE CRIME OF MADISON AVE


"I WILL CHOP HIM IN PIECES" SHRIEKED THE MANIAC, DARTING FORWARD TOWARDS NICK CARTER AND HIS COMPANIONS.
BY THE AUTHOR OF NICK CARTER

As Nora ushered the stranger into the room, she managed by a quick movement to indicate to him the presence of Raphaelo who lay in wait behind the portieres.



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# THE HOUSE WITH THE OPEN DOOR;

OR,

# The Double Crime of Madison Avenue.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE SILENT HOUSE WITH THE OPEN DOOR.

On the morning of the twenty-first day of October a policeman, who was on his way to the relief station where he was to deliver his responsibilities over to another patrolman, and thus be relieved from duty for the ensuing twenty-four hours, discovered that the front door of one of the most pretentious residences on his beat was wide ajar.

The hour was quite early in the morning—too early, in fact, for the appearance of the servants on the front steps for the early morning cleaning, and yet the officer halted in his tracks and waited, confidently expecting to see one appear with broom or dust rag.

The house that was thus unguarded, was situated on Madison Avenue, not far from the square itself, and, therefore, in one of the most select and exclusive localities of the city of New York. It was also one of the most elegant and newest of the houses in that district—one which this particular officer had often noticed, and in a vague way admired, as being his own idea of the sort of house he would like to build for himself when the magical ship of fortune should cast its anchor at his doors.

He was, therefore, surprised to discover the front door open thus early in the morning, and especially so for the reason that he could not recall a single instance during all the months he had been on that beat, when that door had been open at all, before this moment.

Day and night it had always been closed, and he suddenly remembered that he had never happened to see a person entering or leaving it.

He had often seen servants at the basement door, often noticed grocers' and butchers' delivery clerks at

the grating under the steps, but he could not now recall a single instance when he had noticed a human being at the front door itself, or had seen it open, before this time.

He waited, therefore, with really more curiosity than concern, for he was not yet impressed with the idea that anything was wrong inside the house; that conviction had not yet forced itself upon him.

After five minutes had passed in this way, he became restless; after five more, he acknowledged to himself that he was anxious, and when he had waited fifteen minutes, he decided that he would investigate.

The time for him to appear at the corner where he was to exchange with his relief, was already at hand, but he felt that his duty was plainly here, and, having made up his mind, he did not hesitate.

He ascended the steps, passed inside the vestibule, and peered anxiously into the hall.

Everything seemed to be in perfct order, although the house was as silent as the grave, and, in spite of the arguments of his essentially practical mind, and his self-assurance that nothing was amiss, he realized a strange sense of depression upon him, as if the very air of the place were surcharged with ominous forebodings.

"Hello, there!" Hello, there! Anybody there?"

He waited then, but there was no reply to his appeal, and presently he called again:

"Hello, there! Hello there! Anybody there?"

Still there was no response, so he stepped back out of the vestibule and pressed the electric button.

The current responded to his touch. He could hear the rattle of the bell below stairs, quite plainly from where he stood; but he heard nothing else than that. The sound of it brought forth no response whatever.

Three times he rang the bell thus, and then, having received no response of any kind, he passed through both doors, determined to investigate.

There, for one instant, he paused while he considered whether it was his duty to return to the street and to rap for assistance, or to proceed as he was until he had obtained some definite information, and he presently decided upon the latter course as the most logical and reasonable.

As he stepped forward, he came upon the curtained arch which was the means of communication between the hallway and the drawing room, and he stepped through into the latter place.

Everything there was in perfect order, and, although he was not aware that he possessed any of the detective instinct, he nevertheless noticed that three chairs had been drawn toward the center of the room, as if they had been occupied by persons engaged in earnest and more or less confidential conversation, and, moreover, that two lights were still burning in the room, although the time was now considerably past daylight.

One of these lights came from a drop-lamp, stationed upon the table in the middle of the room—the one toward which the three chairs had been drawn; the other came from a bracket lamp—they were both electric—which was directly above a small desk which stood against the wall where the partition divided the drawing room from the hallway through which he had entered.

He also noticed, with an unconscious regard to detail, that a half-smoked cigar was perched upon one edge of the desk, and that there was writing material ready for use upon the blotter-pad; and that the chair in front of the desk was in the position in which it would most likely be abandoned by a person who had been seated there, and who had left it abruptly or had been hastily called away.

The officer did no more than to cross the threshold of the room, to look up and down it, and then to call aloud, asking if there was any person within the sound of his voice.

Nobody responded to his appeal, and he backed out of the room again.

Next, he passed through the hall to the end of it, for there it opened into a wide room, which extended the full width of the house, and which, a glance informed him, was the library.

The walls of this room were lined with bookcases filled with books, which in turn were protected by glass doors. There was also a couch, several leather-

covered chairs, a reclining chair, and a library table covered with magazines and the general clutter of such a place.

This table was, of course, in the center of the room. There was a droplight, still burning, upon it, and the reclining chair, with a foot-rest, conveniently placed before it, was drawn up close to the table so that a person seated there would have the light directly upon the pages of whatever book that person might be engaged in reading.

Upon the table, convenient to the hand of a person seated in the chair, was a late copy of *Ainslee's Magazine*. It was open at about the middle, and was lying face down, as if it had been placed in that position by a person who had intended to take it up again in a moment.

The officer noticed no more than these few facts.

He did not regard himself as a detective, and possessed no aspirations in that line. His sole purpose in examining the interior of the house, was to discover if there was any person there who could explain the reason for the open door, and also the extraordinary silence which abounded.

He called aloud again here, as he had done in the drawing room, and, again receiving no response, he withdrew.

It was a question with him now, whether he should proceed to the basement, or ascend to the second floor, and, after a moment of hesitation, he decided upon the latter course.

Already he had become so interested in his occupation that he had forgotten the fact that he was long overdue at the point of relief.

Having mounted to the second floor, he paused in the upper hall for a moment, perceiving at a glance that there were three rooms and a bath room on that floor, and that the doors which communicated with each of them were closed.

The hallway did not extend the length of the house. At the front it ended at the door which should open into the room which doubtless extended the full width of the house, and which, therefore, would be over the drawing room and the lower hall. To the left, as he advanced, was another door, which probably communicated with a side room—a part of a suite formed by the two rooms.

He rapped loudly against these doors, one after the other, and, receiving no response, attempted to open them.

Both resisted his efforts; both were locked, and to his repeated calls he received no reply.

For a moment he meditated upon the idea of forcing one or both of these doors, but deciding that his duty did not go so far as that, he turned his attention to the other doors on that floor.

There were two more. One of these was at the end of the hall at the rear, and should open into the room directly over the library; the other was at the right, as one would turn after ascending the stairs, and must, he believed, open into the bath room.

He rapped first upon the rear door, and, after waiting a moment, he tried to open it as he had the others at the front.

This door, he discovered, was also locked against him, and again he called aloud.

The echo of his own voice through the otherwise silent hall, was the only response he received, and he paused in genuine consternation.

"Here is a puzzle for an officer who has been only two years on the force," he mused, "and who wants to do the right thing at the right time. I'll just have a try at that bath-room door, and if that is locked like the others, I'll call for assistance. I noticed a telephone on the table in the library. I can make use of that and talk directly with the sergeant at the station house."

Returning to the bath room door, he rapped again, and waited.

Then, after a moment, he placed his hand upon the knob and turned it.

Unlike the other doors on this floor, it was not locked. It yielded immediately to his touch, and he pushed it open and stepped across the threshold.

But that was as far as he got, for he came to a sudden stop, and then started back with a cry of terror.

And well might he do so.

The room presented the appearance of a slaughter house.

There was blood spattered upon the walls and upon the ceiling. The tiled floor was almost covered with it, and scattered everywhere about the place was a litter of blood-soaked towels and sheets.

One glance at the bath tub completed the horror of the scene, for it was filled almost to the top with blood-stained water, and floating, face down, in the midst of it, was the nude body of a man.

The officer waited to see no more.

With a cry of horror, he leaped out of the bath room, and dashed down the stairs and through the lower hall into the street.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE SECRETS OF THE SECOND FLOOR.

It was just half an hour later when Nick Carter entered the house referred to in the last chapter, and the circumstance of his being there so promptly after the discovery of the tragedy by the policeman, happened in this way:

When the officer, whose name was Terrence McGinty, ran so precipitately from the house of horror, he almost leaped into the arms of Patsy, one of Nick Carter's assistants, and, recognizing him instantly, he paused abruptly in his wild career.

"Sure, Pat," he said, "I'm glad to see you at this minute. Run, like a good fellow, and telephone for me to the station house. Tell the sergeant that I have found a house on my beat that is spattered with blood, that the bath room is soaked with it, and that there is the dead body of a man in the tub. It's frightful, Pat; and I know I ought not to touch a thing or to leave the door, which I found open, until somebody arrives to take charge of things; and tell him that I'll stand here on guard at the door till he gets here. Will you do that?"

"Cert!" replied Patsy; "but mind, Terrence, don't you let a soul in there till the sergeant gets here, no matter even if the roundsman should happen along, which he is not at all likely to do at this hour."

"Nobody will get inside till I get orders from the sergeant, don't you worry," replied McGinty.

Patsy found a telephone in a nearby drug store, but, instead of calling up the police station at once, he called his chief, Nick Carter, and in a few words related what had been told to him.

Now, it happened, quite fortunately, that Inspector McClusky had an engagement with the detective that morning, in reference to a matter of some importance about which they had agreed to consult, and that he had just arrived when Patsy telephoned.

Therefore, when Nick received the message, he ordered Patsy to wait a moment, and then, while he still held the receiver at his ear, he described to the inspector all that Patsy had said.

"Tell him," said the inspector, "to return to McGinty, and wait with him at the door until we arrive, for we will go there at once—as soon as we have communicated with the station house and turned in McGinty's report.

"This looks like an interesting affair, Nick," he added, when that was done. "Now, if you will let me have the phone for a moment."

He called up the station house and instructed the sergeant to report at once with a half dozen reserves, at the house in Madison Avenue, and directed that nobody was to enter the residence until he and Nick Carter got there.

The policemen from the station house and the inspector, with Nick Carter, arrived at almost the same moment, and thus it happened that Nick Carter, followed by the chief of the detective bureau of the city, was the first one to enter the Madison Avenue house after McGinty fled from it in such terror.

"Order all of them to remain outside until we tell them to come in," suggested Nick. "You know who lived here, don't you, inspector?"

"I can't say that I do, Nick," replied the inspector. "This precinct has been so quiet of late that I have paid very little attention to it. But, stop! I do know, of course."

"I thought so."

"Attila Corazona, eh? I have her name with this address, on my records, but I had forgotten it for the moment."

They were inside the house by this time.

During the short pause on the steps, McGinty had related all he had to tell about what he had discovered there, and accordingly the two great detectives devoted merely a glance upon the interior of the drawing room, but proceeded at once to the second floor, and directly to the bath room.

McGinty's description of the interior of that room had been none too graphic. It was literally bespattered with blood from one end to the other; so thoroughly, indeed, that it seemed almost as if it were purposely done—as if the person who accomplished it had deliberately used every possible effort to render the appearance of the room as horrible as possible.

Nick and the inspector halted in the doorway to take a general survey of the place, and then at the same instant they cast at each other an intelligent and meaning glance, for each had read the same meaning in that one comprehensive and searching survey.

Neither of them spoke, however; but Nick, who was slightly in advance of the inspector, crossed to the bath tub, and, with a deft touch of his hand, turned the half floating body over in the water, so that the head for an instant protruded from it, facing him.

But if either of the detectives had expected to gain anything by a view of the face of the victim in the bath tub, they were both doomed to disappointment, for it was battered into a shapeless mass, and had been rendered totally beyond the possibility of recognition.

The detective permitted it to swing back again into the position it had previously occupied—face downward—and then he returned to the doorway.

"You would have some difficulty in identifying his picture in your gallery of rogues," said Nick, with a grimace; "but all the same, I am of the opinion that it is there—or that it should be if it is not."

There were two sheets, two pillow cases, a pair of blankets and ten towels in the room, and everyone was more or less soaked with blood. There were splotches of blood on the tiling of the floor, on the walls on every side of the room, on the ceiling itself, and on the sides of the tub wherein the body floated.

The wash basin was in the same condition, save that a delicate handkerchief floated in the water there; a lace handkerchief, such as a woman of taste and refinement would carry on special occasions.

The blood stains on the floor and walls had partly dried, and in two places on these spots on the floor were imprinted the marks of a woman's shoes. One of them represented the right shoe and the other the left one.

Nick and the inspector backed out of the room and closed the door behind them.

"I think," said Nick, "that we have seen enough of that for the present—until we return there with the coroner. Now, which one of these locked doors shall we tackle first?"

"Let us take the rear room," replied the inspector. "Can you open it?"

"Easily," said Nick. He produced his pick-lock, for there was no key in the lock on the opposite side of the door, and in a moment more they entered the room together.

But the room was not occupied, not even by another victim of the terrible vengeance of the murderer's hand. It was fully and completely furnished, and had evidently been used by the dwellers in the house as a general living room. Nevertheless, everything there was in perfect order.

"Nothing doing here," said Nick. "We can examine this room later, also."

"I think we will find something more in one of the front rooms," suggested the inspector.

"What do you expect to find there?" asked Nick.

"Attila Corazona—or all that is left of her," was the laconic reply, and Nick nodded his head emphatically to signify that he agreed with him.

They were only a short time in opening the door of the front room, and as they passed inside, they saw that this apartment was also used as a sort of sitting room; but as a private one, however; and that the room behind it, with which it was connected by a door which was now closed, doubtless served as the bedroom.

The room into which they entered was not in ap-

parent disorder; neither could it be said to be in perfect order. It was, in a word, in that condition which is produced by a general and continuous use of any room.

There was an easy-chair near one of the windows, and an evening paper of the preceding day had been dropped carelessly upon the floor beside it. There was another comfortably upholstered chair near the second window, and, beside that, a small stand upon which was a half-emptied box of Egyptian cigarettes, a silver match safe, and a tray filled to the brim with the butts of closely smoked cigarettes.

There was a magazine and a book on the floor between this chair and the window, and on every side was evidence of the general condition of disorder which obtains in the room of every careless and easy-going individual who has nothing to do in life save to kill time in the most agreeable and easiest available fashion.

A mere glance at the objects described was all that the detectives required in connection with this room at the present moment, for they each realized that there must be yet another grewsome discovery awaiting them beyond the threshold of the adjoining room, which was the bedroom of that suite.

It was Nick Carter who stepped to the door and threw it open. The electric lights were burning in there, as elsewhere in the house, and, consequently, every article in the room was instantly discernible.

As Nick halted at the threshold, the inspector joined him, and they stood thus, side by side, many seconds before either of them spoke; and then it was the inspector who broke the silence, for Nick Carter was already busily engaged in his characteristic occupation of searching, with his eagle-eyed inspection, every detail of the place; however, neither of the detectives as yet made any motion to pass the threshold.

"One might suppose that she were sleeping," said the inspector, in a voice that was hushed almost to a whisper; and then their eyes again sought that corner of the room where, in the depths of a huge, leather-covered chair, the silent, motionless, lifeless figure of a beautiful woman confronted them.

"It is Attila Corazona," replied Nick; "and she is dead. Wait; let us look about us carefully before we enter."

The young woman was dressed as she might have arrayed herself for an evening alone with her favorite novel, or, as she might have received intimate friends—in a sort of elegant and refined negligee which enhanced her beauty, while it gave added ease of motion and comfort of repose to her occupations.

And there was not a suggestion of violence which could be discovered from the position in which the detectives occupied the doorway. The room itself offered no evidence that it had been entered by another person than herself; and she looked as if she had fallen asleep, quite naturally, in the chair where she was seated, dead. There was an open book on her lap, and one hand rested upon the pages as if to hold it in that position, and her whole appearance was precisely as the inspector had suggested—as if she were sleeping.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE METHODS OF TWO GREAT DETECTIVES.

An observer would have been impressed by the exact methods of these two great detectives, as well as by the perfect harmony with which they worked together.

Truth to tell, their methods in many respects were so exactly alike, that they rarely found it necessary to consult with each other while they were making investigations.

And now, after that first hesitating pause during which they had each observed every detail within the room, they stepped farther inside, as with one impulse, and each went about his own line of investigation as methodically as if they had known before they came to that door, what was to be discovered beyond it, and had agreed upon their course of action.

Nick Carter directed his steps at once to the body of the woman.

He had seen from the doorway enough to convince him that she had not died in the attitude in which they discovered her—enough to satisfy one so discerning as he was, that she had been placed in that chair after

her death, and that, whoever it was who had put her there, that person had intended to give the impression that death had come to her unannounced, or that it had been self-inflicted after she had prepared herself for it.

As he bent over the body, he noticed that the hand which rested on the book, partly concealed a long, slender tube of glass, such as physicians use for holding tablets.

Now, however, the tube was empty, although he could see, along the under side of it, a very slight discoloration, like a faint stain of green—so faint that it was barely discernible.

Raising his eyes to the beautiful, dead face again, he discovered a stain of the same delicate shade of green upon her chin. The spot was no larger than the head of an ordinary pin, and it was so faint that only the eyes of one who searched systematically could have discovered it; but it was unmistakably there, and it had quite as surely been made by an infinitesimal drop of the fluid which had been contained in the glass tube which now rested on the pages of the open book, underneath the delicately beautiful and richly jeweled left hand of Attila Corazona.

Her right hand rested upon the arm of the chair, gracefully and negligently, as if it had fallen there quite naturally when she dropped asleep. Her slippered feet seemed barely to touch the hassock upon which they had been placed, and her head, inclining just a little to one side, was against the upholstered back of the chair in a position which was perfectly natural, as if she had assumed it in a thoroughly unstudied way, after composing herself to sleep.

"Whoever it was who arranged her in this chair, was an artist at the business," said the detective, aloud; but the inspector, from the opposite side of the room, merely grunted a reply, for he was busily engaged in his own line of investigation.

Nick shot one rapid glance in his direction, and then, with a smile, continued his own researches silently.

He touched the hand which rested upon the book, silently and almost reverently, and then the right hand which touched upon the arm of the chair. Both were cold in death. Then for the fraction of an instant, he permitted the tips of his fingers to touch her brow, now as cold and almost as white as marble.

Presently he produced his magnifying glass, and through it he devoted a careful and somewhat lengthy study, first to the shadowy shade of green in the glass tube, and then to the little spot of the same color on the young woman's chin.

Next, in the same manner, he examined her hands, first one and then the other, but during all this time he was careful not to touch or to disturb anything about the body.

It will be remembered that he approached the body alone; that the inspector had given his attention to other parts of the room, and now he stepped back again toward the door through which he had entered the room, and he walked on his toes, and backward as he did so.

Arrived at the door, he crouched low and ran his eyes along the surface of the rich velvet carpet; and then, still crouching, he moved along the sides of the room until he could see the nap of the carpet against the lights.

Then, with direct precision, he crept forward and with his glass studied sections of the carpet, doubtless where the feet of some person had pressed upon it.

Evidently satisfied with what he had discovered in this way, he next gave his attention to the slippered feet of the dead woman, and then, after a moment, he withdrew again to the door and devoted a second—and this time a much more protracted—search, to the carpet itself.

By this time the inspector was examining the body in the chair, in much the same manner that the detective had employed, and Nick, leaving him thus engaged, returned to the outer room.

Here he worked rapidly—almost swiftly, darting hither and thither around the room, stooping here and there to make use of his glass, studying the chairs and the carpet, the chair near the window where it was evident that some person had been engaged in reading, omitting nothing that could offer a suggestion of the occupation of the person or persons who had been in-

side that room within the several hours which preceded the death of Attila Corazona.

Then, just as the inspector came out of the room where the body was found, Nick descended to the drawing room.

Here, also, he was very busy for almost half an hour, darting hither and thither, now stooping until he almost crouched, and now raised to his tiptoes; now stationed at one end or side of the room and studying it searchingly and silently with his eyes alone, and again changing his position to another side or end of the room to continue the same method of study from a different vantage ground.

Then, when he left the drawing room, and passed through the hall to the library, he met the inspector just coming out of that apartment, and they smiled into each other's eyes as they passed, although neither of them uttered a word.

They knew so well how to work together, these two, and they also knew that if anything of importance should escape the eyes of one of them, the other one would see it and remember it.

From the library, when he had finished there, Nick descended to the basement, and from there, when he had completed his examination of that floor, he ascended the stairs again, and on up the second and third flights to the third floor.

After the third floor, he continued to the fourth and last floor of the house, and always as he went from room to room, and from place to place in that house, he encountered the inspector either entering or leaving a room which he had already examined, or which he was about to search.

Neither disturbed the other. Neither interfered with the other. Neither offered a suggestion to the other, and neither got in the way of the other.

Then, as if by common consent, they met in the library on the first floor two hours after they entered the house, and then for the first time since the discovery of the body of Attila in her sleeping room they broke the silence which had obtained between them.

"Through, Nick?" asked the inspector.

"For the present, yes," replied the detective. "Are you?"

"Yes."

"Shall we telephone for the coroner now?"

"Yes; it is time for that, I think," and the inspector permitted a strange little smile to flit across his face; but he did not move, although the telephone receiver stood upon the table almost at his elbow.

"I will send Patsy around to the drug store," said Nick, also smiling, and the inspector nodded his acquiescence.

Both had discovered that the telephone on the table had been put out of commission, and each was in doubt until that moment if the other had discovered it; each had waited to see if the other would attempt to make use of it, and that exchange of smiles between them contained a world of meaning.

Nick left his chair and crossed the room to one corner of it. There he stooped and picked up something from the floor, returning with it to the table.

"Did you find this?" he asked, placing a small disk as thin as tissue paper on the table in front of him. It was the diaphram of the receiver or the transmitter which some person had removed and thrown carelessly behind him so that it had sailed across the room to the spot where Nick had discovered it while he was searching the library.

"No," replied the inspector, "but I found this;" and he crossed the room to the opposite side, from where he presently returned with a mate to the diaphram which Nick had found. "I found this one and I concealed it so that you would not find it," he added. "I thought I would have a little joke on you, Nick."

Nick Carter smiled broadly, then.

"I hid the one I found, also," he said, "thinking that I would get the joke on you. I think we had better give up trying this sort of a joke on each other, George."

"It would seem so. But, Nick, can you explain the joke which was intended by the one who removed those diaphrams from the receiver and transmitter?"

"No; I can't do that—yet."

"Nor I."

"He went to an awful lot of trouble for a very small result, it would seem," said the inspector.

"All the same, these diaphrams were not removed without good reason; you can bank on that, old man."

"Sure. But I cannot for the life of me think of a possible reason; can you?"

"No, I cannot—just now. I think, though, that a reason for it will occur to both of us later on."

"Humph! Now, about the coroner. Will you send Patsy?"

"At once."

"And will you stay here with him during his preliminary investigations? I must get to my office. Much as I would like to stay here with you, I can't. Still, I think we have been rather thorough as far as we have gone."

"Yes; but we can't tell what more will turn up when the bodies are moved and a more thorough knowledge of the details is obtainable."

"As soon as you are through here, will you come to headquarters? We will go over the case together then, in detail, and compare notes."

"I will go to you there the instant I can get away from here," assented Nick.

"All right, Nick. Then I'll leave things in your charge."

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE BULL FIGHTER'S DAUGHTER.

Nick Carter and the inspector did not, however, get together for their discussion of the facts connected with the Corazona case as early as they had anticipated. Other matters engaged the attention of the inspector during the afternoon, and the coroner, under the suggestion of the detective, found that he could profitably spend much more time than was usual in a case at the house where these strange tragedies had developed.

It was six o'clock that evening before the bodies of the man and the woman were removed from the house in Madison Avenue, and the place was finally turned over to the charge of a few detailed policemen.

But at nine o'clock that night Nick Carter and the inspector, with the coroner who had conducted the investigation, were closeted together in the private office of the inspector.

When the inspector had given orders that they were not to be interrupted on any account, he turned to the coroner and said:

"Now, sir, I suppose that Mr. Carter has already told you that we spent some time in the house where these bodies were found before we thought it expedient to notify you."

"Yes," assented the coroner.

"We did that," continued the inspector, "because we are both trained to investigations of this sort, and because we agreed that we could facilitate your work in the matter much better by doing so. We do not wish, either of us, to take away one jot from your prerogatives—in fact, our only desires in the matter were, first, of course, to unravel the mystery of the double tragedy, and second, to assist you all we could."

"I feel very grateful to both of you," said the coroner.

"Mr. Carter has also told you, I suppose, that we disturbed nothing whatever during the examination we made; that everything was left for your eyes just as we discovered the place originally?"

"Yes; he told me that, also."

"Then, coroner, I have this to suggest: That you regard this meeting here as a sort of informal inquest that you are holding. Let us proceed in the right way in order to get at the facts as expeditiously as possible. Then, later, when the proper time comes, you can call your jury and proceed with your formal inquest. How does that idea impress you?"

"I think that I am greatly indebted to you both for your thoughtful assistance, inspector. With the united aid of two such men as you are, the unraveling of this mystery should be a comparatively easy matter."

"I'm not so sure of that," murmured the inspector.

"Nor I," added Nick. "This strikes me as rather an involved affair, as you will see as we proceed."

"Without doubt," said the coroner, "you have already discussed the matter between you, and have at least arrived at some definite idea of procedure."

"On the contrary," replied the inspector, "we have not exchanged a word on this subject."

"Do you mean to tell me," exclaimed the coroner, "that you went through that house together, studying the appearance of things there, and investigating everything you saw, without exchanging opinions about each detail?"

"I mean to say," said Nick, "that our examinations were in every way as thoroughly individual as they would have been if we had each been there utterly alone. I have no more idea of the inspector's opinion of the facts connected with this case than you have; he has no more idea of my opinion than you have. We are each in the dark concerning the conclusions of the other."

"Extraordinary!" said the coroner.

"We have often worked together in this way before now," continued Nick, "and we find that it inevitably produces excellent results."

"But how, and why?"

"For the reason that if we happen to differ on any important point we discuss that point thoroughly from his view of it and from mine; the result is that we often arrive at a modification of each opinion, and that modification is more than often proved to be the view that is entirely correct. I suppose the inspector's present purpose is for us to conduct that discussion in your presence."

"Partly," said the inspector. "I thought it would be a good idea to regard this meeting exactly as an informal inquest, and let the coroner conduct the examination exactly as if we were on the witness stand in his court."

"Good!" said Nick.

"Then we are agreed on that point?" asked the inspector, addressing the coroner.

"Decidedly," was the reply.

"Then," continued the inspector, "my first duty is plainly to read to you an abstract from my morgue."

"Your morgue!" exclaimed the coroner. "What in the world may that be?"

"It is a sort of an anticipated obituary," explained the inspector. "You must know, coroner, that whenever there happens to be a person in the city of New York whose career, for any reason whatsoever, may some day prove to be of interest to the police, I make it my business to obtain the record of that person and reduce it to writing."

"I see."

"That record is copied into one of these books," and he opened the doors of a huge safe, displaying many rows of mammoth books, like bank ledgers. "These books are alphabetically arranged. The name of each person whose record I keep is entered here in the proper place, and there are sufficient blank pages after each one to accommodate any subsequent history which that person may make, which is worthy of entry here."

"I suppose you have got my record there, as well as others," suggested the coroner, with a grimace, and with some uneasiness.

"Oh, yes, of course," assented the inspector; "and I have no doubt that you would be surprised if you should read it—surprised to learn how much is really known about your life, of things which you suppose nobody but yourself knows. But we will let that pass. My business is to turn now to the record of Attila Corazona."

"What! You have her record also?" asked the coroner.

"Certainly; and it is quite complete. Listen; I will read it to you."

He took one of the volumes from its shelf in the safe, and spread it open on his lap. He spent a moment or two in turning the pages, and then with a glance toward the coroner, he said:

"Here it is. Are you ready?"

"Yes; go ahead. I am all curiosity to discover what you know about her."

"'Attila Corazona was born in Madrid, Spain, in 1881. She is the daughter of a matador—a bull fighter—who was known as El Castillo del Corazon, which means the "Heart's Knife." Corazon was killed

by a bull in the ring at Seville, in the year 1889, when his daughter was eight years old.

"'One of Corazon's favorite acts in the ring was to take his baby daughter inside with him when the capaderos were withdrawn, and he took the sword and the red capa to finish off the bull. This child showed such intrepidity at such times that she was given the name of La Corazona by the crowds which used to yell with delight over her danger. It was due to her presence that her father was killed at last, for he gave up his life to save hers.

"'After the death of her father she was adopted by another bull fighter, but she was not permitted again to enter the ring, whereupon this other bull fighter turned her adrift, and for a time she was lost sight of, so far as this information extends.

"'She next appears in Paris, at the age of seventeen, and as the wife of a gambler. It was her duty to entertain, and to attract by her beauty, such men as had plenty of money to lose to her husband.

"'She appears to have performed this service with great success, for her husband, whose name was Attila Le Fevre—doubtless an assumed name—speedily became very rich, and subsequently retired from business to an elegant chateau, where he lived in luxury.

"'One morning in October, 1899, Le Fevre was found in his bed with a knife through his heart and his widow was arrested for the crime. She succeeded, however, in providing a satisfactory alibi, and she was discharged; the French police, however, always believed that she at least had guilty knowledge of the crime, and when, subsequently, she came to this country, I was notified, and her record was sent to me.

"'She came here almost two years ago, and has lived, ever since, in the house where she died, for she purchased it almost at once.'"

"Then she was a rich woman, was she?" interrupted the coroner.

"'She inherited,'" continued the inspector, still reading from the book, "'all of her husband's vast estate, and is reputed to be worth six million francs—something over a million dollars.'"

The inspector raised his eyes from the book for a moment.

"I find here," he said, "a lot of uninteresting entries. They are reports of little excursions she has taken into the country, to the seashore, etc. In short," he added, closing the book, "there is nothing more of interest here. She has done nothing, apparently, since she has lived in the Madison Avenue house, save to live there as quietly and as unostentatiously as any respectable woman could do."

"Had she no callers? No friends?"

"Apparently not. She seemed to avoid friendships. She had no intimates."

"But she did not live alone in that big house, did she?" asked the coroner.

"No. She kept two maids; that is all. One to wait upon her; the other to prepare her meals."

"Where are those maids now? They might be able to tell us something about this affair."

"They are at this moment detained in this building," replied the inspector, with a smile. "I made it my immediate duty to look them up, when I left that house this morning."

Nick Carter nodded and smiled.

"I thought you would attend to that," he said.

"Have you questioned them?" asked the coroner.

"Certainly."

"And what do they say?"

"Nothing. They appear to know nothing whatever about the matter; and I believe them; one of them, particularly, I believe, and I have no reason for doubting the other one; but I will have both of them brought in presently and you shall question them for yourself. I have not had time to give them very thorough attention. In fact, I thought it best to await this consultation."

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## CHAPTER V.

### AN ARTIST AT MURDERING.

"Let us have them up at once," suggested the coroner, referring to the two maids. "Surely if they

were questioned closely enough they must be able to throw some light upon our proceedings."

"And I think they will, at the right time," said the inspector; "but I do not think that moment has arrived as yet. Let us complete what we are about, first."

"All right. Then I am to understand that you know nothing more about Miss, or rather Mrs., Corazona, than you have read from that book?"

"I have read to you all that the book itself knows."

"Her life, you say, has been exemplary since she has lived in that house?"

"Quite so."

"There is nothing, in fact, against her or her character since she has resided in this country?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Mr. Carter tells me that he is convinced that she was murdered in the front room of the two which formed her private suite, and that she was carried into the rear room after she was dead, and placed in the chair as you found her. Do you agree with him in that idea?"

"Perfectly."

"He has told me nothing concerning his opinion of the manner of her death. He was simply an observer while we were conducting our examinations. There was the empty tube under her hand on the book, the tube which doubtless contained poison, but I could detect no odor from it, and now, until the autopsy is held to-morrow morning, there seems to be no way of getting at the truth. I wish, however, that you would give me your opinion, inspector."

"I think," replied the inspector, slowly, and with a quick and meaning glance at the detective, "that you had better question Mr. Carter now. It is his turn. I have no doubt that our conclusions are the same, but I should like to hear his first, especially on this part of the subject. Before you proceed, however, I should like to ask you one question, or possibly several."

"I'm heard, then."

"Did you find no mark or marks of violence on any part of her body?"

"No—and again, yes."

"What do you mean by that?"

"There is a mark about the size of a silver quarter on the left side of her neck. It has assumed the same color that would ordinarily be the result of a blow, but I cannot say that it came from a bruise. In fact, it looks to me as if it were a permanent mark—one that she has worn all her life, or at least since she was a child."

"I saw the mark you refer to," said the inspector; "only when I saw it, it was not much, if any, larger than a dime. When you see it again in the morning I think it will be as large as a saucer; and—but no; I will not tell you that yet. I will leave what was in my mind just then for future developments; but I will say this: I have good reason for believing that there was no such mark on Attila Corazona's neck twenty-four hours ago."

"Humph!" said the coroner.

Nick Carter stared at the ceiling and smiled at the painted cupids around the chandelier, but he said nothing.

"Did you also see the mark when it was the size of a dime, Mr. Carter?" asked the coroner.

"I did," replied Nick.

"What do you think about it?"

"I agree with the inspector, that in all probability it was not there at all yesterday—that is, we will say, as late as the afternoon of yesterday."

"Humph! Do you think that she came to her death by swallowing the poison that was contained in that glass tube we found under her hand?"

"No," replied Nick. "I do not."

"Then how——"

"I think the poison that was contained in that glass tube killed her, but I do not think she swallowed it."

"Then how did it kill her?"

"I think that the tube contained a venom rather than a poison, which is perhaps a distinction without a difference, and I think it entered her body through that blue-black mark, or stain, on the left side of her neck."

"The devil you do!"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, I had not thought of that view of the case. Do you agree with him, inspector?"

"Perfectly—so far."

The coroner turned again to the detective.

"How do you connect the two murders?" he asked.

"I don't connect them at all," replied Nick Carter, calmly.

The inspector started and bent a keenly scrutinizing glance upon his friend; but he made no remark. The coroner continued:

"Do you think that—no. Wait. I'll get at my question in a different way. Which murder, in your opinion, was committed first, the woman or the man?"

"Attila Corazona had been dead several hours when the man in the bath tub was killed," replied Nick, as calmly as before, and again the inspector started.

"Do you think that the same person who killed Attila Corazona also killed the man in the bath tub?" pursued the coroner.

"No; I do not."

"Why?"

"Because I am of the opinion that it was the man in the bath tub who killed Attila."

The coroner permitted himself to whistle, in astonishment. The inspector allowed himself an incredulous smile; then he spoke, addressing the coroner:

"We have arrived at the first point where Mr. Carter and I differ," he said, "for we are of different opinions on that point; but perhaps I am unfair. It may be that I am better informed on one point than he is, for the reason that I——"

Nick raised one hand toward the inspector and stopped him.

"You need not refer just now to the fact that you were inside that house some time during the afternoon of yesterday," he said, with a smile, "for I already know that you were there, that you were seated in the drawing room for some time, and that it was your cigar, half smoked, which was still on the edge of the desk in that room when we entered the house. Did you suppose that I would not recognize your signature, George?"

"My signature?"

"Yes; the signature left on the end of the cigar by your teeth. Do you think I have not smoked with you often enough to know how you mark a cigar when you lay it aside? If you should send me one of your half-smoked cigars from Egypt or from the North Pole I would know from whom it came."

The inspector laughed and the coroner started.

"You chaps are beyond me!" he exclaimed.

"We have to be," said Nick.

"All the same," said the inspector, addressing Nick, "I don't agree with you about those two murders. I was in that house during the afternoon of yesterday, and I, for that reason, have cause to believe that the same hand committed both murders. I agree with you—or to speak correctly, I do not entirely disagree with you in the idea that the woman was killed first, but I am positive in my own mind that the man whose body we found in the tub did not kill Attila Corazona."

"Perhaps I saw something which neither of you noticed," said the coroner, with great unction.

"What was that?" asked Nick.

"Well, you know there were footprints in the blood stains on the floor of the bath room?"

"Sure."

"There was also a blood stain on the soles of each of the slippers worn by the corpse of Attila Corazona. They were pretty well rubbed off, but they were there just the same. Now, if she was killed first, how could she have got those stains on the soles of her slippers? She couldn't very well walk into that room after she was dead, could she?"

"Not very well; no; and she didn't."

"There is blood on the soles of those slippers."

"Sure; but there is not a drop of blood on the carpet anywhere in that house."

"Eh? What do you mean by that?"

"Why, if she had stepped into the blood in the bath room and so stained her slippers, and had then walked out of the room to return to her own room, she would have stained the carpet in the hallway, wouldn't she? And perhaps also the carpet of her own room?"

"Why, yes; but I suppose——"

"That we had found such stains and had failed to mention them? Or that there were such stains there, to be found, if we should look for them?"

"No; something like that."

"You begin at the wrong end, coroner."

"All right. Show me the right end and I will begin there."

"Very well," said Nick. "The right end is this: All that battering in of the face so that it might not be recognized, and all that stabbing of the body of the man in the tub, was done after he was dead. The blood on the floor, on the walls and ceiling, on the towels and sheets and pillow cases—in fact, every drop of blood which appears in sight anywhere about the place, was deliberately put where it is in order that whoever entered there afterward might find it. The man was killed in precisely the same manner as the woman, and by the same weapon—a hypodermic syringe. You can enter that much in your diary of facts, if you please, for it is true."

"If you had not already stated that you think the two murders were committed by different persons, one would suppose that you were on the point of accusing the butchered man of suicide," said the inspector, with some show of sarcasm.

"And one might be pretty near to the truth at that," replied Nick, "for until a few moments ago that was my opinion. I will tell you presently why I have changed my mind on that point."

"It isn't likely that he butchered himself or battered in his own face," said the inspector.

"No," assented Nick; "it is not. Nor is it likely that the person who did that butchering and battering was the same one who killed Attila. The man in the tub was an artist at murdering, and he worked for gold and because he was tired of love; the person who killed him, and who butchered and battered him, did all that in a rage of vengeance, and because he loved the woman whom the other had killed."

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE PLOT OF THE UNSEEN PERSON.

"Will you tell me, Mr. Carter, exactly what is your opinion of the crime?" asked the coroner.

"I will tell you of several events which I think led up to the double crime. I will tell you a little romance which I have created out of my own mind and which is adapted from what I have seen in that house to-day. I do not say that I have exactly formed an opinion of the crime as yet; that is, one which I can rely upon sufficiently well to use as a working proposition. I think before I do that I will have to ask the inspector to tell me what previous knowledge he had of the affairs of Attila Corazona."

"I will do that now, if you like, Nick," said the inspector.

"No; wait. Let us see first if my principle of putting two and two together will not avail us something. I will tell you what I have gleamed from my examination of the premises, and it is possible that I may refer to something, one thing or another, to which your own previous knowledge may have blinded you; and it is also possible that your own story will have more meaning to me after I have grouped my own ideas together in proper form."

"All right. Go ahead."

"In the first place, inspector, I know that you were in that house yesterday afternoon, and I know that you held a consultation in the drawing room, at which three persons were present. I suppose those three persons to have been yourself, Attila Corazona and the man whose body we found in the bath tub."

"Humph! And I suppose that the third person who was present at that interview is the man who killed them both," said the inspector.

"Just as I thought you would," agreed Nick, "and it is just as I would doubtless also suppose if I were hampered by any previous knowledge of the conditions which existed there. This is a point, George, where previous knowledge is a detriment instead of a help, as I think I can prove. I think that you are prejudiced in your judgment by the interview of yesterday, just as I might have been prejudiced had I also been present; but I think we will agree before I have finished."

"All right. Go ahead. I won't interrupt again."

"Thanks. Now, I suppose that I am also correct in

supposing that yesterday was the first time you were ever in that house."

"You certainly are."

"I arrive at that decision for this reason. If you had been there before you would have mentioned the fact when we were together at my house this morning when Patsy telephoned to me; and again, when I asked you if you knew whose house it was, as we were on the point of entering it this morning, you would have said 'Yes' at once, if you had not already made up your mind not to tell me that you had been there lately, at least until after we had proceeded farther in our investigations.

"I did not doubt you at that moment, but when I entered the drawing room and saw the half-smoked cigar on the desk I recognized it instantly. I knew that the chair at the desk was the one you had sat upon, and I quite naturally asked myself why you had thought it wise to keep the fact from me.

"The answer was obvious—at least to me.

"You had been called there at the request of some person. There was only one person who would be likely to make that request—Attila herself.

"There was only one reason why she would be inclined to make such a request of the chief of the detective bureau. You must remember that she was Spanish by birth and French by education. In Paris people call upon the chief of the detective bureau to protect them whenever they have reason to believe their lives to be in danger. Here they report the circumstances to the nearest police captain.

"I said to myself, something like this: 'Attila sent for the inspector because her life has been threatened, or because she believed she has good reason to suppose that it was threatened. He has heard a story from her lips which he believes will afford him a clew to the crime that has been committed in this house and he does not wish to tell me about it until we consult together after our investigation.'

"Now, that answer to my question entirely satisfied me, for I approved of it. If you had told me, out there on the steps, that you had been in the house only the day before that time I should have requested you not to tell me the details of it till later.

"When we went to the bath room to see if McGinty had stretched the truth about the place looking like a shambles—and God knows that he had not—I saw that you took very little interest in that particular murder; why? Because you were already assured in your own mind that there had been another one in the house, and that we were soon to find the body of its mistress. I saw also that you did not refer at all to the identity of the man whose face had been battered out of recognition. Why? Because you were already satisfied in your own mind concerning his identity.

"Well, I put two and two together again, and I told myself that in that consultation in the drawing room you had received a very careful description of the man at whose hands the mistress of the house feared violence, and that you had already made up your mind that the man in the tub was that individual; so just for the sake of making it positive, either that it was or it was not that man, I worked on the theory that it was not the man who had been described to you, but that it was the man who had been seated in the drawing room with you.

"I figured that if I worked upon one theory while you already believed in the other one, that something would occur to prove that one of us was right and that the other was wrong, while on the other hand, if I had heard your story and was made to believe as you did, because of that story, we would be draggling along with guesswork where we should have provided ourselves with facts.

"At that time I put this man who was with Attila when she received you in the drawing room, in the position of her lover, but you tell me that her life has been exemplary since she has lived in New York, so I change all that and conclude that he was a relative. You did not read from your book that she had a brother, but all the same she may have had one who was older than she.

"At all events, a man was present when she received you; he occupied the position of a confidential [illegible] and friend, else he would not have been there; and

you were satisfied that he had a right to be present in that capacity, else you would have consulted with her alone. I know your peculiarities on that point, you see. He was there, he had a right to be there and you recognized that right.

"Now, if she had had a husband, you would have read that fact from your book just now. You assert that she has lived an exemplary life of late—perhaps always, save the episode of the gambling and the suspicion that she may have had something to do with the death of her husband in France—hence he was not her lover. He was a young man, not yet at middle age, and so he could not have well been on such confidential terms with her without being a lover, unless he was a near relative, so I conclude that he was a brother and that you were assured of that fact while you were there.

"Now I go still farther, and I say that it is because you know that he was her brother that you feel so certain that he is the man in the tub, and that the man who was described to you is the murderer.

"You do not wish to believe that a brother, who appeared to be extremely fond of his sister, and for whom that sister doubtless expressed her love in your presence, would murder his sister.

"I assume that you were told in that interview that the lives of both the brother and the sister were in danger. I assume that the man who threatened them was described to you as a creature of fiendish propensities and of the utmost craft. I assume that you were given to understand that he was not unlike the brother in general appearance as to physique and build—age also, perhaps, and——"

"Nick," interrupted the inspector, "this is wonderful. One might think that you were actually present at that interview, by the way you figure it out. And you are correct in every surmise you have made so far."

"Wait, inspector. I am correct only because I know you so well. Only because I am perfectly familiar with your train of thought in cases of this kind, just as you are familiar with mine. You would work out the same conclusions if our positions were reversed. There is not a thing that is wonderful about it, as you should be the first to admit.

"You see, George, here was a beautiful woman, as bewitching as she was beautiful. You saw her in her own house. You saw her with her brother. You read from her conduct that she loved that brother. You imbibed her confidence, to a certain extent, in that brother. You were under the spell of her eyes and her presence, and so was he. Even if your impulse was to mistrust him, you argued that you had no good reason for doing so, and that it was up to you to take her word and her conduct for his recommendation."

"That is right, too."

"There you are. Now, you still think that the brother was the man in the tub. You still think that the murderer was the man who was described to you; and you may be right. It is just as logical to believe that you are right, from the point at which we have now arrived, as to suppose that my idea is the correct one."

"But you have not yet said what your idea is."

"My idea is that calling you to the house was a part of a plot concocted by the brother for getting rid of his sister and getting his claws on her money, while at the same time he could force the commission of the crime—that is, the apparent guilt of it—upon another. My idea is that the brother meant to kill his sister and to make it appear that the man who was described to you at that interview was the guilty party. He meant then to assist in his capture, and to swear away that other fellow's life, if necessary.

"But his plans did not work as he intended they should.

"This other man somehow appeared on the scene at an inopportune moment. He discovered the dead body of Attila, somehow, or he suspected that it was there and forced the brother to confess. No matter how. I am dealing in guesswork now, only this I am certain about: I am certain that he attacked the brother, or that the brother attacked him. I am certain that they fought, and I believe that while they fought together, the hypodermic needle, containing the deadly poison—the terrible weapon with which the brother slew the

knife was again brought into use and made to do its deadly work.

"But in this case it was the would-be slayer who was slain. It was the brother who had already made deadly use of the needle, and who would now have used it again, who actually received the point of it. It was the stranger who saw, who recognized and who therefore feared the needle, who forced its point into the flesh of his opponent, and so killed him.

"And now, I will tell you why I am so certain of this point."

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE TERRIBLE WORK OF A MANIAC.

Nick Carter paused for a moment, and then continued:

"I will ask you to bear in mind," he said, "that I am still unaware of what passed during that interview between you and the brother and sister, and that I merely assume what happened by reason of such observations as I have been able to make.

"You did not make use of a glass in your investigations. I did. People often scoff at the employment of a magnifying glass in criminal cases, but all the same it very often reveals facts which would otherwise remain forever hidden.

"The carpets of those rooms are fortunately thick and soft; in other words, they are Axminster carpets: and Axminster receives and holds impressions much better than any other texture. If you examine the surface of such a carpet from one point of view it may reveal nothing more than a smooth surface, but if you pass around to the other side so that the light will fall upon it from a different angle you will frequently discover, at the same spot where your eye detected nothing at the first examination, a rough spot which tells as plainly as words might do it, that something has pressed upon the carpet at that spot. If you keep the same light on that particular spot and apply the power of a magnifying glass to it, there are inevitably a thousand chances against one that you will make discoveries which will surprise you.

"I took great pains to make thorough examinations of the carpets in every room of that house wherein any of the three persons involved in this affair might have trodden.

"It is, of course, folly to suppose that the tread of a mere footprint would leave its mark sufficiently plain for me to determine its character, but it is quite logical to suppose that if two men struggled together, even for an instant of time, while their feet were pressed upon such a carpet, the fact would be written there in the form of deeper indentations, and in the turning of heels and toes against it, when a greater than ordinary weight were pressed upon them.

"And again, if a man who weighs say one hundred and seventy pounds merely walked across the floor in an ordinary manner, he would leave no imprint that would be discoverable, as, for instance, the walking about those rooms which we did while engaged in our investigations. But, if a man of that weight should carry a dead weight of 140 pounds from one room to another, picking that weight up in his arms in one room and depositing it carefully out of his arms in another room, the points where he had raised that weight into his arms, and where he had stooped to relieve himself of the burden would be marked by certain heel and toe indentations in carpets like those, as you can readily prove if you will try the experiment.

"And again, if a man of that weight should get down upon his knees upon such a carpet, and through the power of some emotion remain in that position for a considerable length of time, he would leave an imprint of the fact that he had done so; and he would leave it more surely and plainly for the reason that it was an unaccustomed attitude and that involuntarily and unconsciously he kept moving his knees, because of the unaccustomed use to which they were subjected, and the unusual weight resting upon them. The motions he thus made tend to render the impressions upon the carpet the deeper and stronger. You will agree with me in this.

"My magnifying glass came into play here. By its use I find that there was a struggle—a very short one, to be sure, but nevertheless a struggle—in the

drawing room. It occurred at the back of the room, at the opposite side of the table from the desk and chair where you were seated when you were there; and it was near the portière curtains, as if one of the persons engaged in the struggle had stepped unexpectedly from concealment behind them.

"I find also, at that point, good evidence that the body of a man or a woman has been prone upon the floor. Not because the body itself left any imprint upon the carpet, but because that body was presently lifted from its place and half dragged, half carried across the room into the hall and up the stairs. If you will take my glass and examine the points I refer to you will readily discover the marks made by the dragging heels, and if you and I and a hundred other people were to walk across them for a week they would not be obliterated beyond discovery by the glass. There is also the imprint of the heels of the man who carried the body, and the steady progression of those imprints across the floor and up the stairs.

"From all this I conclude that the man—I believe it was the brother and you still are of the opinion that it was the stranger—was killed in the drawing room; that he was afterward dragged up the stairs to the bath room; and that he was left there, for the time at least, and I suppose it to have been an hour or more, while the man who had done the killing went about other things.

"And here, inspector, is where I determine that it was the brother who was killed in the drawing room, and not the stranger:

"I find in the two rooms of the suite personally occupied by Attila Corazona, that some person, a man without a doubt, passed an hour or more on his knees beside that chair near the window where I believe Attila to have been seated when she was killed.

"I say that he was an hour or more on his knees there, because I have studied with my glass the imprints left by them on the carpet, and I do not think they could have been so indelibly produced in less time. More than that, he continually moved his knees while he was there, and if he had not remained a considerable time there would have been no uneasiness to compel his involuntary motions.

"I find, also, that the jeweled fingers of the dead woman have been squeezed together, as if her hands had been held and caressed by a person who has passionately loved her, and who has found her lifeless.

"I find, also, imprints of his heels and toes in the carpet near that chair, made when he stooped to lift her from it in order to carry her into the adjoining room, and I find heel and toe marks around the chair in the bedroom where we discovered her, made by him when he placed her there. There are also heel marks across the floor, which he made in carrying her.

"But you will ask, why did he carry her there at all? And I reply, because he loved her. Because he could not leave her where the glaring sunlight should fall upon her when day broke over the world; and I go still farther and assert that the brother would have done none of these things.

"He would not have passed an hour or more on his knees beside her dead body; he would not have squeezed her dead fingers, in affectionate passion, so that the rings left indelible impressions against the lifeless flesh; he would not have cared about the rising sun, and he would not have considered it worth his while to remove her to the quiet of her own room, and to arrange her there, with loving hands, so that she appeared to be sleeping; and, what is still more important, he would not have gone out of the house by the front door, leaving it open so that the first passer-by would wonder, then investigate and report, and finally so that the body of the woman he loved would be discovered and cared for before the ravages of time and decay had spoiled its matchless beauty.

"Now, let us go back a step:

"What passion was it which compelled the mutilation of the body of the man in the tub? If my theory is correct, no such passion existed at the time the man was killed. It came afterward and was induced, in my opinion, by revenge—by hate implacable, and so I continue my story thus:

"The stranger did not know that Attila was dead when he killed her brother, so he dragged the body of

the brother to the bath room, left it there and closed the door while he went to find her.

"I assume that when he discovered her he supposed her to be sleeping; that he fell upon his knees beside her for the purpose of a confession and to offer to give himself up, while he assured her that he had not meant to kill her brother; that he instantly found that she was dead, and that in his agony over the discovery it did not occur to him to think how or why it had happened.

"In his grief he forgot everything but his grief, but after a time he began to think.

"He knew, then, what had killed her, and he realized for the first time that the brother had committed the acts and also that he had himself been lured there. The attack from behind the curtain in the drawing room proved that.

"I assume that he sprang to his feet in fury, and was on the point of returning to the bath room to wreak vengeance upon the lifeless body, when his eyes fell again upon the form of the woman he loved, and he realized that there was a duty which he owed to her first.

"It was then that he worked over her. It was then when he carried her into the back room. It was then when her gradually stiffening arms and limbs rendered it difficult for him to arrange her in a natural position, that his rage turned into maniacal fury. He could with difficulty wait to complete his task there, in his eagerness to wreak vengeance upon the body in the bath room, else he would have fallen upon his knees a second time. This he did not do.

"At last he did return to the bath room, and the sight of the dead man on the floor and the memory of what he had done drove the last vestige of sanity out of him. He stamped his feet upon the upturned face; but that was not enough.

"In his thirst for inflicting cruelty and inhumanity upon that inanimate clay, he dragged the body again into the hallway. There he disrobed it, and with the deliberate intention of working off his rage by systematically mutilating it.

"When it was naked he threw it again into the bath room. Then he pounced upon it. He kicked it and stamped upon it. He pounded it with his fists. He drew his penknife and made use of that, as the cuts upon the body prove, and he held a regular carnival of blood in that room, as the room itself proves, and then, in the very excess of fury, he dabbled towels and sheets from the hamper into the blood and threw them helter-skelter around the room.

"I assume that the body was already in the bath tub—that he had placed it there before he began the hacking process. Do you realize that there would have been ten times—nay, twenty times, more blood in that room if the mutilation of the body had occurred immediately after death? The blood had had time to thicken before the cutting began.

"When he had partly worn out his strength and fury he was covered from head to feet with clotted blood. It was on his hands and face, his clothing was stained with it as if he had slept in a shambles, and he seized the first thing which came to hand, which proved to be a handkerchief which had fallen from the hamper, and sought to use the wash basin to cleanse himself.

"But he speedily discovered that neither the basin nor the handkerchief were adequate, and he turned on the water in the tub.

"There he washed the blood from his hands and face, but he could not cleanse his clothing of it.

"He did not dare to leave his own clothing in that house and he dared less to go upon the street with those tell-tale stains visible upon him, and therefore he donned the murdered man's clothing over his own.

"That clothing had no stains upon it. He began at the shirt and thus he covered the iniquitous stains from sight.

"It was time now for him to take his departure, but he could not go without one more appeal for forgiveness in the presence of the dead woman in the other room.

"Did you notice, inspector, tucked away under the chair by the window where Attila was seated when she was killed, a pair of house slippers? Of course you did. She had been wearing those, and had

dropped them from her feet while she was reading. In moving her, this crazed lover had not noticed that she was in her stockinged feet, but when he returned to the room later he discovered the fact.

"Did you notice also that the shoe bag hangs in the closet off the bathroom? Certainly. He remembered that also and he returned there for the slippers that were on her feet when we discovered her. They are not slippers really—low shoes, rather. I doubt if she would have worn them when at her ease and engaged in reading her favorite novel; but he did not think of that.

"He stepped into the bath room carefully in order not to spoil his own shoes, but he did drop those which he took from the bag, and they left their imprint there. Nevertheless, it was an easy matter to wipe them off with a towel, to take them to the bedroom and adjust them to her feet."

"You have forgotten one important thing," said the inspector. "The glass tube found under her hand on the open book."

"No, I have not. I am not quite through yet," replied the detective. "That was in one of the pockets of the clothing of the brother, which the stranger had put on over his own. Moreover, it was not empty; it was more than half full, for I found——"

"Where it had been poured into a small china cup on the mantel in that room? So did I," interrupted the inspector.

"The coroner already has it under seal," added Nick, "and I know what the poison is, for I have tested it. It kills like lightning. It is called *La muerta de la alma*—the death of the soul—and is distilled from the venom of a small, green snake which thrives on the banks of the Orinoco, in Brazil."

"All right, Nick. Go ahead."

"I think he found the bottle in one of the pockets, as I have said, and that he poured the contents into the cup; that by accident or design, he spilled the tiny drop upon Attila's chin, and that he placed the tube under her hand with the deliberate intention of conveying the impression that she had taken her own life."

"God knows that there is sufficient evidence that she could not have accomplished the other horror," said the coroner.

"And He also knows," said Nick, "that in body can explain reasons which produce results in the mind of a maniac."

"What do you mean by that?" asked the coroner.

"He means," said the inspector, before Nick could reply, "that Antonio de la Vuelta—for that is the man's name, Nick—was a raving maniac when he attacked the lifeless body in the bath room, and that what he did after that was a consequence of his insanity."

"Exactly," assented Nick. "I think, moreover, that he is still a maniac, and that he will remain one till the end of his days."

"And," said the inspector, "that he will be apprehended somewhere, within a short time, and held for a suspicious character, and that we will hear about him and ultimately find him in that manner."

"Just that. Exactly that, inspector. And when he is found he will still be wearing the blood-stained clothes beneath those which he took from the dead body he mutilated so horribly."

"Humph!" ejaculated the coroner; and he rose and walked to the opposite end of the room.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE INSPECTOR'S SIDE OF THE CASE.

"Well," said the inspector, "I suppose it is up to me to tell my story now, isn't it?"

"Just about," smiled Nick Carter. "Your idea that the brother is alive and that the man in the tub was Antonio de la Vuelta is probably just as tenable as mine."

"Not quite, Nick, for you discovered a few things with the aid of your glass, which escaped my attention. I think that hereafter I will carry such a glass with me."

"There are times when they do good work," said the detective.

"Yes; you have proved that."

"Well, let us hear the story."

"I was called on the telephone yesterday, about eleven o'clock in the forenoon. It was the voice of a woman that addressed me, and an unusually sweet voice at that.

"She said that she was Attila Corazona, and gave her address. She added that she wished to report to me that her life had been threatened, and that she would be grateful if I would permit her an interview here at this office.

"I replied that I would go to her. The truth is, I had a desire to see the inside of her establishment, and regarded that as an excellent opportunity.

"I went there at two o'clock in the afternoon. There was a gentleman with her who was introduced to me as her brother, Raphaelo Corazon, and while his face was about as ugly and repulsive as you could see in a long day of travel, and her own was extremely beautiful, there was still an unmistakable resemblance between them. I did not and do not doubt that the man was her brother.

"Their story was that he had arrived in this country only the preceding day; that he had come over on the same ship with one Antonio de la Vuelta; that Antonio had been a suitor for Attila's hand since the death of her husband in France, and that his was the hand which undoubtedly had killed Attila Le Fevre.

"He was described to me as being a man of Raphaelo's build and physique, although several years younger; in face and manner he was handsome and attractive, and that he was of a genial and affectionate disposition when he was himself, but that he was subject to violent fits of temper which amounted to insanity, and that at such times he was more dangerous to have around than a rattlesnake or the devil himself.

"They related a group of stories to prove the statement, and they convinced me, too.

"Antonio had written constantly to Attila ever since she had been in this country. He had finally announced that he was coming here after her, and had named the ship on which he would sail; and he had threatened, if he was repulsed, to wreak such a terrible reckoning against her that it would thrill the world with horror—and all that sort of rot. I read the letter; I have it in my possession now, in fact.

"When Attila received the letter she sent for her brother, who came on the same ship with Antonio.

"Among the things told me by Raphaelo, he said that Antonio was an adept with strange poisons; that he had traveled among the Indians of South America and knew their poisons; that he was, in fact, a descendant of one branch of the Borgia family, and a lot of that sort of twaddle to which I paid very little attention. I hear such tales too often.

"I asked them in what manner and when they expected to be attacked, and what they wished me to do for their protection, but they had nothing to suggest.

"I told them that I could do nothing in the matter until Antonio had been guilty of an act which would justify me in interfering, unless they could make a specific charge against him, to the effect that he had threatened them.

"Raphaelo, however, did not wish to have anything done; he did wish me to have the man Antonio shadowed, and offered to pay handsomely for the service, so I gave him your address, Nick, and told him to consult you."

"I never saw him," said the detective.

"I remained about an hour in the house, I think; but to tell the truth, I was not especially impressed by their stories, and I came away without believing that they had any real cause to fear this man.

"In fact, I regarded his threats as mere brag, amounting to nothing, and I classed them as such. I will admit to you that I was impressed by nothing in that house so much as by the beauty of its mistress, her apparent loneliness, and her devotion to a brother whose appearance, at least, belied his worthiness.

"This morning, Nick, when you received the phone message from Patsy, while I was seated near you in your house, I was more surprised than I care to admit, even to myself, now.

"I kept silent about my call at that house, first, because I wished to see with my own eyes what had really happened before I committed myself to an opinion; and second, because I know your peculiarities of

work so well, that I knew you would wish me to do so. The result of it all has proved that I was correct.

"When we arrived at the house and you asked me if I knew who lived there, I purposely appeared to hesitate in making my reply, and I did it in order to give you a clew to the fact.

"I remembered, then, the cigar I had left on the desk in the drawing room, and wondered if you would recognize it. You have more than once called my attention to a chance cigar butt on the street or in a hotel, and have said that such a person had smoked that particular cigar. I knew that you had made the signature of the teeth one of your hobbies, and I was curious to know if you would recognize my own as quickly.

"When your glance fell upon it you flashed your eyes just once in my direction. I would not have seen that flash if I had not been expecting it, but I knew then that you were aware of the fact that I was the one who had left it there. Attila, herself, offered me the cigar and pressed me to smoke it, and—you may believe it or not—it was not particularly a good one. I was glad to lay it aside and forget it.

"All the time, from the moment when we entered the house, I expected to discover the corpse of Attila.

"McGinty's report had already prepared me for the sight we discovered in the bath room, and I will confess that I had already determined in my own mind whose corpse it was, having drawn my conclusion from the letter I have referred to. Antonio—if he wrote the letter, which I am beginning to doubt—had threatened, not only to kill Attila, if she repulsed him, but also to kill and to mutilate the body of her brother, and to add a few other general horrors to the scene as well.

"I decided off-hand, then, that it was the brother whose body was in the bath tub and that it was Antonio who had killed them both—and I was angry at myself for having paid so little attention to his threats, which he seemed to have lost no time in consummating.

"I noticed many of the things which you discovered in going through the house, but not being provided with a glass, some of the minor details upon which you built so well, escaped my attention; and moreover, because you were there, I contented myself with a more general survey of affairs than I would otherwise have done, because I knew so well that you would leave no spot in the house unsearched.

"During my call there the previous day I made some general inquiries concerning the personnel of the household and discovered that Attila had been in the habit of keeping only two maids with her—one, as I have said, to wait upon her in person, and the other to prepare such meals as she took in the house.

"But the advent of her brother had compelled changes in her mode of living. Both maids were comparatively new in her employ, and she had decided to change them; to send them away the next morning—this morning, in fact—and this item, you will observe, upholds your theory that the entire affair was the result of a plot hatched by the brother, which I am now inclined to accept as the truth.

"It was through his agency, doubtless, that these maids were sent away, and also that new servants were not already on hand to fill their places.

"We both saw that the rooms occupied by the maids had been used the preceding night, and that they had not been cared for, and we both surmised that the maids had left, and had known that they were going to leave when they arose this morning, else they would have cared for their rooms as usual.

"Convinced of that, I lost no time in tracing them as soon as I left you, with the result that they were brought here to this office only a short time before you arrived with the coroner."

"So you have not yet questioned them?"

"No; I decided to wait until we could do so together."

"Then suppose we have them up now."

"We will, in just a moment. I want to add this to what I am saying: My idea that the same hand had struck down both victims was the natural result of the letter and the conversation I had with the brother and sister, but in the light of your discoveries and your reasoning upon what you did discover, I have come to the conclusion that you are correct in your view of the case, and I think now, as you do, that the murderer will be found to be a raving maniac when he is at last discovered."

"And," said Nick, "that he really killed the man he did in self-defense, while they were struggling together in the parlor, and that his later act of mutilation was the act of a madman; that, in short, the brother is the only real and deliberate murderer in the case, for I am convinced that it was he who killed Attila Corazona."

"Yes."

"Now for those two maids. Let us find out what they know."

"I am ready."

"Are they Americans or foreigners?"

"One is a young French woman, bred in this country, I think; the other is a middle-aged woman with an Irish name, also American-bred."

"Shall you question them, or do you wish me to do it? Or the coroner?" asked Nick.

"I think you had better do that yourself, if the coroner is willing," replied the inspector.

"Willing? I'm glad to have him do it," said the coroner. "I want you to both understand that I have learned more about the devious ways of detective work since I have listened to this consultation than I ever dreamed to suspect before. I shall have more respect for your calling hereafter, gentlemen."

"Every man to his trade," laughed Nick.

"Yes," said the inspector, "and the trade of a coroner consists in knowing how to apply what is told to him to the facts of the case as they appear."

Then he reached forward, tapped the bell, and ordered that the two maids be brought into the room.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE STRANGER WHO ARRIVED AT NIGHT.

"Take seats, please," said Nick, when the two women entered the room. "There is no reason why either of you should appear so frightened, for you are not in any danger of any kind. I wish to ask you some questions, and I wish each of you to reply as addressed, and only when addressed, and to make your replies as exact as possible. When you have replied to all the questions and have told the exact truth about all of them, I see no reason why you cannot depart at once to your respective homes. Now," he added, addressing the younger of the two, "what is your name?"

"Marie Dubois, sir."

"And yours?"—to the elder of the two.

"Nora Flanagan, sir."

"Now, Marie, you may reply. How long had you been in the employ of Attila Corazona?"

"Three months."

"How long had Nora been there?"

"We went there together, at the same time and from the same agency, sir."

"Very good. Were you both fond of your mistress?"

"Yes, sir. We loved her. She was goodness itself to us always."

"And why did you leave her employ?"

"It was because of her brother, sir. He was a snake."

"Tell me about it."

"I can't, sir, for I don't know about it myself. He

hadn't been in the house an hour before he was cursing at us in Spanish, which he did not think I understood, but I did, for my mother was a Spanish woman, although my father was French."

"You think that it was through his instrumentality that you were sent away?"

"I know it was, sir, for I heard him talking with his sister about us in Spanish."

"What was he saying?"

"Not much that you could put your finger on, at that, sir. It was simply that she was afraid of some man who had threatened to kill them both, and he advised that she should have servants in the house selected for their faithfulness. He told her that he had brought two such over with him in the steamer for that very purpose, and she consented to let us go.

"I think, sir, that he lied about that, and that he only wished to get rid of us for some purpose of his own which he did not care to tell her. Anyhow, we were sent away, without warning, although she did give each of us a month's pay in advance."

"When did you leave the house? Be careful now, for it is important that you tell me as nearly as you can the exact time of your departure."

"Well, sir, I know that we did not do right, but we were both scared of that brother, and we talked it over together and agreed that we would leave soon after dark last night. You see we were expected to remain until this morning, but neither of us wished to do that. It was ten o'clock last night, sir, when we finally got away."

"You did not sleep in your beds, then?"

"No, sir. We got into them and mussed them up so they would look as if they had been slept in. You see, sir, our mistress never disturbed us in the evening, so we had no thought that she would want us, and we thought by mussing the beds we would make her think that we had been there all night, while, in fact, we would get away at once."

"Why, then, did you wait till ten o'clock? Why did you not go earlier?"

"We did intend to do so, but we couldn't."

"Why not?"

"We were all ready to leave—had our hats on, even, when that brother called to me to come downstairs."

"What did he want and what did he say to you?"

"I took off my hat and hurried down to him. He said that he was expecting a caller who would arrive about half-past nine, or between that and ten o'clock, and that when the bell rang I was to admit the gentleman."

"What did——"

"But that was not all of it, sir."

"Well, what else?"

"He said the stranger would ask for him, and that I was to say that he had gone out for an hour, and ask the gentleman to wait in the parlor. I asked him if I was to inform mademoiselle, and he told me on no account; that he had given me all the instructions he had to give.

"I went up, then, and sat on the second flight of stairs. I did not go into my room for fear that I would not hear the bell. Mr. Corazon went into his sister's room and stayed there a few moments. Then he went down to the parlor floor and into the drawing room, and he did not come out again, for I would have known it when he did."

"What then?"

"It was not long after that when the bell rang and I went to the door. It was a handsome man who stood on the steps, and he asked for Mr. Corazon. I told him that Mr. Corazon had said that he was going out for a little while, but that I had not heard him go; that he might be in the drawing room, waiting; and I

went into the drawing room myself to turn up the light and to see if he was there."

"Was he there?"

"Yes, sir, he was; but he did not know that I saw him. He was hiding behind the portières at the back end of the drawing room."

"What did you do?"

"Nothing. I went out of the room, but as I did so I managed to point, so that the stranger would see me, toward the portières."

"Did he seem to understand?"

"Yes; he nodded his head."

"Did you hear anything after you left the room?"

"Yes, sir; I heard the stranger say in Spanish: 'Why do you hide from me, my friend?'"

"What did you do then?"

"Nothing, only hurry upstairs where Nora was waiting for me, pick up my things, and then we both ran down the stairs, and went out through the basement door into the street."

"You were obliged to pass the drawing-room door in coming down, were you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you hear anything inside the room?"

"Not a sound, sir."

"Nor you, Nora?"

"No, sir. I was that scared that I doubt if I could have heard anything, anyway. We are both honest, and we both felt that we were not doing right in leaving the house in that manner."

"Do you think, Marie, that your mistress also expected the gentleman to call?"

"No, sir. I am sure that she did not."

"Why?"

"Because she told me that she should pass the evening in her own room. I helped her into her wrapper with the flowing sleeves and took off her shoes. I got her soft slippers and put them on her feet, and found her book that she was reading and gave it to her, with her cigarettes, matches and everything she would require. I am satisfied that she intended to sit in that chair where I left her, until it was time for her to retire. That was her habit when I attended to her in that way."

"What chair was it, Marie?"

"The low chair near the window on the south side of the room. The windows front west, you know, and that was the south window."

"I understand. And you put the soft slippers on her feet, did you? The ones with the eiderdown trimming?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was that the last time you saw her?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you bid her good-by?"

"No, sir. I did not wish her to think that I was leaving until morning."

"Weren't you, Nora, expected to get breakfast for them in the morning?"

"No, sir," replied Nora. "I was told that I need not do so."

"I think, Nick," said the inspector at this juncture, "that the presence of the servants in the house explains the presence of that unopened bottle of chloroform in the sleeping room occupied by the brother."

"Undoubtedly," assented Nick. "He did not mean to injure them, but he intended that they should sleep soundly just the same."

"What happened, sir?" asked Marie. "Has anything happened to mademoiselle?"

"Yes, Marie, something very serious happened. Cannot you suspect what it is?"

"No, sir; not unless her brother murdered her."

"Why her brother? Why not the gentleman whom you admitted to the house before you left it?"

"That gentleman would not hurt a fly, he was that handsome; but the brother——"

"Well, what of him?"

"He wasn't there only a day, sir, but we were both afraid of him."

"Why were you afraid of him?"

"He was crafty, sir, and sullen. He had an evil gleam in his eyes and he showed his teeth cruelly when he tried to smile. But he couldn't smile. He didn't know how. I don't like people who don't know how to laugh."

"Neither do I. What else did he do?"

"He went tiptoeing around the house, peering into places where he had no business to look at all, and he spent almost all his time in the library where mademoiselle kept her little safe. I looked through the ground glass door twice and saw him on his knees in front of it."

"Indeed. What do you suppose he was doing?"

"Trying to get inside of it. Mademoiselle kept her jewels and her money there."

"But she also kept the safe locked, did she not?"

"Always."

"It is locked still," said Nick, as if he were thinking aloud. "Mr. Corazon was killed before he had time to open it, if he intended to do so."

"Was he killed, too, sir?" asked Marie, horrified.

"Yes."

"Who killed him?"

"The stranger whom you admitted at the front door."

"Then it served him right, for I would stake my life that he was waiting behind the curtain to kill the stranger. That was why I warned him by pointing toward the curtains."

"Why do you think he was waiting there to kill the stranger?"

"I don't know, sir, only that I do think so. That was why we hurried out of the house so fast after I went back up the stairs."

"Why did you not warn your mistress?"

"I didn't dare."

Nick turned toward the inspector.

"A woman's intuition seems rather correct after all," he said, with a smile. "She says that the brother killed the sister; she says that the brother waited behind the curtain to kill the stranger, and she does not know why she says these things, only that she thinks so. What do you think of that, inspector?"

"I think we can let these women go now," replied the inspector; "don't you?"

"Yes. You know where to find them if you want them, of course. Marie, I am obliged to you and Nora. You can both go now."

"Won't you tell us about our mistress, sir?"

"Not now. Read the papers in the morning and you will know all about it. Good-night."

The two women were escorted to the door by an officer who was called in, and then Nick turned again to the inspector.

"Now, old chap," he said, "it is almost time for you to tell the rest of your end of the story. I know, for example, that you were not informed about the ship on which both of these men arrived, without making investigations concerning both of them, and their conduct while on the voyage. I should not wonder if you put that wire in motion even before you heard of the murder; and I shouldn't wonder if you have a surprise in store for the coroner and me. Am I right?"

## CHAPTER X.

### HOW TWO GREAT DETECTIVES WORK TOGETHER.

The inspector smiled.

"I have been wondering how long it would be before you would suggest something about the steamer," he said.

"I did not need to suggest anything about it for the reason that I was sure you had attended to it," replied the detective.

"What about it?" asked Nick.

"Well, they came over together. There is truth in that much at least."

"Were they friendly on the voyage over?"

"Very, it would seem; almost like brothers."

"I assumed that from the story told by Marie about the call at the house and the question, 'Why do you hide from me, my friend?'."

"Corazon introduced Antonio as his future brother-in-law."

"Really?"

"He did, for a fact. He must have had a mighty poor opinion of the police on this side of the Atlantic."

"You looked them both up immediately after your interview at the house, did you not?"

"Sure thing, Nick."

"And you kept a shadow on Antonio from the moment you found him, didn't you?"

"Sure thing again."

"And you thought you would fool me into believing that you would neglect as important a factor as that?"

"No, Nick. I wanted a chance to guy you a little, that is all."

"Well, you came mighty near to doing it. If I did not know you so well, and know your work so well, and also know that you would like nothing better than to get a joke on me, you might have succeeded. Now, I say, don t you think that you have another person here at police headquarters, at present locked in one of the cells downstairs, who might assist us at this consultation?"

"I shouldn't wonder if I had."

"When did you arrest him?"

"About an hour after I left you at Attila's house?"

"And he was the stranger? He was Antonio and not the brother?"

"Are you still in doubt on that point?"

"No; but I am never positive that I am right until I am sure that I am not wrong."

"Well, it is Antonio."

"And he is mad?"

"As a hatter. A raving maniac."

"And you took the opposite side of the question just to bother me, eh?"

"No; I did it to assist you in proving your two-plus-two theory, and also to satisfy myself."

"Did he have on the bloody clothing underneath the other suit?"

"He did."

"How did you nail him?"

"He was shadowed to the house. The shadow had no instructions to do more than tell me where he went and what he did, so the shadow waited outside till he reappeared, and while he waited he heard or saw nothing to attract his attention."

"He saw the women, Marie and Nora come out?"

"Sure; but they did not interest him. He's only a shadow, and the best in the business."

"What time did Antonio come out?"

"About three in the morning."

"Did not the shadow notice that he left the door open?"

"No; the shadow was not watching the house. He was watching the man."

"How did he appear?"

"At first, just the same as usual. After a while he began to wave his arms; then he became quiet again. Say, that shadow is almost dead yet, for Antonio took him a dance which he won't soon forget. He walked him almost to Yonkers."

"And then——"

"The shadow telephoned in here to me that the man

was crazy. The message came just as I arrived here from the house in Madison Avenue. That is all. I had him brought here at once. We stripped him and searched him. His clothes looked worse than that bath room."

"I should suppose they would. Have him brought up here. I would like to see him."

"I think it would be bettter to go down to him, Nick. I've got him in the padded cell."

The three men arose as with one accord and went out of the room together, and presently, after descending the stairs, they came to a halt in front of the grating behind which Antonio de la Vuelta was confined.

He was wide awake, crouched in one corner of the cell, and he had stripped every stitch of clothing from his body.

As they approached he glared at them for a moment out of bloodshot eyes, and then he rose slowly and painfully to his feet.

To the great astonishment of all three officials he addressed them in tones that were perfectly rational.

"Let me speak to you," he said, "while I have control of my intelligence. You see that I speak your language perfectly well. No? I am Antonio de la Vuelta, a Spaniard. I have loved Chiquita Corazona, for that is what we used to call her, since she was a child. When she married another I was mad. I have been mad ever since at times. I was placed in an asylum outside of Paris, in France. Not long ago, when I was better, and they were thinking of permitting me to go, Raphaelo Corazon came to see me. I went mad again then, but I had cunning and I concealed it.

"Then I was set at liberty, and Raphaelo told me that he would bring me to this country and that his sister would marry me.

"I came with him, quite content, and satisfied that my madness would never return.

"We parted at the steamer and he said that he would arrange for our meeting. Then he sent me a note telling me that I was to go to the house at half-past nine in the evening.

"I do not remember the day. I think it was yesterday, but I have been mad since then—I shall soon be mad again now. I must talk rapidly.

"I went there. A woman admitted me. I entered the parlor. Raphaelo was awaiting me, concealed behind a curtain. He attacked me with some of his deadly poison, which he carries in a needle syringe. We fought. I pressed the syringe into him instead of his wounding me with it, and he dropped dead at my feet.

"Then I dragged him up the stairs and left him in the bath room while I went in search of Chiquita to tell her about it, for the struggle had brought back my madness.

"I found her, but she was also dead. I got upon my knees beside her, and then——"

He stopped abruptly and passed one hand across his brow.

"I can remember no more," he said. "It is gone from me; but——"

He darted forward as near to them as he could approach.

"When I find Raphaelo," he shrieked, "I will chop him in pieces!"

Then, with a yell, he burst into uncontrollable laughter, and the officials turned away and left him.

* * * * * * *

"Gentlemen," said the coroner, when they were again in the inspector's office, "I have now only to hold my inquest. I have had many strange adventures since I have been coroner, but this is at once the saddest and most wonderful of all my official life."

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 402, will contain "The Society of Assassination; or, The Detective's Double Disguise." This story will deal with the unearthing of one of the big Italian secret societies. When you read it you will vote it one of the best stories you have ever read.

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